Men Stars in the Theatre Skies

JULIA BRUNS in "THE BLUE PEARL" at the SHUBERT-RIVIERA THEATRE.

NORMAN TREVOR and BEATRICE BECKLEY in "AN IDEAL HUSBAND"

CHARLOTTE GRANVILLE, CYRIL MAUDE and LAURA HOPE CREWS in "THE SAVING GRACE"

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WILLIAM COURTENAY and EVELYN EGERTON in "THE MAID OF THE MOUNTAINS"

MARILYNN MILLER in "THE ZIEGFELD FOLLIES" BACK IN TOWN and AT THE GLOBE THEATRE.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

INSISTENCE on the importance of technical expertness in the plays of the theatre may be called a criterion of criticism lower than others which aim to discover other qualities in them. To study the beauties of character a play contains, to estimate the truth to life which inspires its men and women, to defer to its poetic or imaginative beauty—these are standards which are not to be deprecated. Their importance is indeed sufficient to make their presence in the work of a playwright a benediction to be devoutly grateful for. It is by the possession of such beauties that the really notable dramatic works are revealed to the world. No true critic of the theatre would deny the necessity if not the indispensability of such qualities. They would assuredly be loudly proclaimed, and the playwright who had succeeded in enriching the drama of the world by the creation of any such qualities is to be added to the number of the immortals.

What makes the observance of the laws of dramatic technique so inevitably necessary is their power to save all these great qualities of the drama to the actual theatre. In no other form of art is a defective technic so fatal to any longevity. The painter who draws badly may have his pictures on view for years that the world may admire the beauty of his color. Defective training need not then destroy his fame nor obscure what there is in his work to give delight to all who see it. Merely on account of errors in the artist's technical means his work, with all it may contain of the best, is not inevitably lost.

Nor is defective composition in a poem or a book certain to be the cause of its disappearance forever. While an imperfection on the part of the poet may impair the smoothness of his versification the qualities of imagination and whatever else the creative spirit may have imparted to the work will remain as accessible as ever to the reading world. The beauty of those parts not affected by his lack of technical skill is as perceptible as if the whole were perfect. Although a poem or a novel or any form of literary expression may thus be rendered less admirable on account of weakness in method what there is of gold remains, and is not lost to a world that needs beauty so badly. Thus for the fame of the author and the everlasting delight of men the immortal part of the written pages remains.

But with the art of the theatre, the result is not the same. Defective constructive arrangement may altogether negative the skill of the playwright who has brought to the stage in originality and truth something all but priceless. Unless he has acquired the skill or may by accident contrive to blunder into the correct manner of putting his idea before the world its disappearance is certain to follow. No work of art is so hopelessly deserted as the play which does not interest. It has but the slightest chance of survival. It will not merely be contemptuously dismissed after a hearing. It will be so ignored as to depart from public consideration without a hearing. Such is the fate of the play that fails. No amount of originality in its tale, no end of wit and truth in its exposition of character will avail to interest the public in a drama that has not been set in order in accordance with the laws that experience has taught to be indispensable.

Thus by the neglect of such technical characteristics is the best that a playwright may do lost to the world, lost, moreover, irreclaimably, since nothing in the world is so dead as a play that has failed. It may be of course added to the books on the library shelves. But that is little more than practical banishment from the thoughts of the world, since the play that is only a play to be read fulfils but a small part of its purpose. It is therefore important that anything so indispensable to the preservation of the best qualities of the theatre as the correct use of its means should be encouraged. To encourage the study of technique is but to struggle for the preservation of qualities rarer maybe but nevertheless dependent for their survival on the manner of their employment.

The Empire Theatre seems to have recovered its artistic conscience. During the last year it fell sadly from grace. The unprepared and careless first performances witnessed there whenever there was anything to be seen for the first time were indulgently viewed by the chroniclers of events in the theatre. It was quite in the way that one would regret the loss of memory or any other failing in an old friend. It was of course deplorable, but there was no eartly use in talking about it. Last Monday it looked as if the clouds, mental or otherwise, had rolled away.

Of course it is not possible always to get a play so finished and so expert in its composition as "The Saving Grace." Haddon Chambers writes few dramas. It is not easy to understand that they should be such an intellectual strain as most of them are in the school of the comedy now at the Empire. It is much better, however, to get one such play from him every few years than to endure the stream of mediocrity and crudity, dulness and conventionality that flows here unremittingly from the London stage, gently impelled by the scholarly hands of Vachell, Maugham, Carton and others. "The Saving Grace" is of a different make. It is an expert, intelligent, sophisticated comedy. The ethics of its story may be open to question in some quarters, but in any such quarters it is morale and not art which is made the standard of judgment.

With its slight story the texture of the new play is as light as a feather, although its structure is as firm as a cathedral. There is a constant flow of entertaining talk, although none of it is so brilliant as to demand the use of blinders for the audience. But there is a welcome absence of the perfectly apparent struggle to be amusing. Nobody seemed to be straining to talk wittily. Then most of the humor belongs to the characters and the situation. Occasionally Mr. Chambers allows himself the privilege of a joke of his own, such as "he is one of those strong, silent men who never opens his mouth except to be rude to somebody." Nothing in the play is more refreshing than the author's knowledge of the feminine character as it is revealed in several scenes. A delightful interlude is the wife's confession of her mild flirtation with an old general when she thinks of invoking him as an aid to her husband. This is the brightest spot in the last act.

It was of course in the acting that the improvement at the Empire Theatre was observed. Although it was an Empire first night in this year of grace, the actors knew their lines. They knew, moreover, when to enter and leave the scene and they were sufficiently sure to perform these simple manœuvres without disaster. Maybe the name of David Belasco, now an associate manager of the theatre, explains this change. Or Mr. Maude's vigilant eye may have prevented any of the recent blunders witnessed on this stage. Whatever the cause may be, there must inevitably be a sense of gratitude in the heart of every theatregoer who remembers the golden days of the theatre's history.

Cyril Maude is a singular artistic derelict. Probably there is not today on the stage another actor of any eminence so wholly artificial in his methods. Indeed life as a model seems to have made no appeal to him. In place of the mellowness and philosophic viewpoint to be expected in a waster already in the middle years, who has learned his lesson as to the best way to treat a life that had not always been kind to him, amiably and indifferently as he may have approached it, Mr. Maude popped in and out of the play with the abruptness of a jack in the box. As to the thorough understanding of his methods, there is no doubt. He takes no chances, carefully prepares in advance with the devotion of the true artist every impression which he expects his character to make and relies on none of the so-called inspiration of the minute which is the excuse of the dilettante and the indolent. Whatever one may think of the way in which his talents express themselves, there is no question as to the artistic sincerity of the actor.

He does attain an effect of simple naturalness, however, in one situation. Whenever it recurs in his plays his success is equally complete. He can indicate with unfailing naturalness and a sense of reality always affecting his hearers deeply the transition to a mood of gentle pathos. More than once in "The Saving Grace" he is called upon to reveal this emotion and it is always the sincerest note in all his acting. Laura Crews plays by Mr. Maude with a finish and delicacy that make her contribution to the play a most potent cause for its success.

CLARA JOEL in "THE BIG CHANCE"

None of her mannerisms, which had come to seem inseparable from her acting, mars her performance of this most grateful role. It is really a charming part—a devoted, rather harassed wife, who has spoiled her husband's chances for the time by eloping with him from her brutal first husband. Just how deft and skilful Miss Crews is in this new play ought to be understood from her failure once to pucker up her face and look for all the world like a bad baby about to burst into tears. Cathleen Nesbitt, in view of the undoubted fact that she is by nature a tragedienne, plays prettily at the character of a young English girl. Her dusky beauty, the sullen gleam in her eyes and their suspicious start at every word, the curl of her crimson lips, slow to respond to the platitudes of conventional endearment, but quivering to utter the sharp retort of the avenging accusation—these are undisguised proclamations of nature that her art cannot altogether deny. But there are other dark haired beauties also ordained for tragedy had not that form of drama so far disappeared as to give them little opportunity for what they can probably do best.

MARY NASH and JOSE RUBEN in "I. O. U."

THE WEEK'S PLAYS.

MONDAY—At the Vanderbilt, "The Matinee Hero," by Leo Ditrichstein and A. E. Thomas.
At the Globe, Ziegfeld's "Follies of 1918."
At the Punch & Judy, Booth Tarkington's "Penrod," transferred from the Globe.
At the Manhattan Opera House, a second engagement of Lenore Ulric in "Tiger Rose."
TUESDAY—At the Longacre, Willie Collier in "Nothing but Lies," by Aaron Hoffman.
WEDNESDAY—At the Thirty-ninth Street, "The Big Chance," by Grant Morris and Willard Mack.

THE NEW PLAYS.

THE Vanderbilt Theatre, in Forty-eighth street, east of Broadway, will begin its fall and winter season to-morrow evening when Cohan & Harris will present Leo Ditrichstein in a new and original play entitled "The Matinee Hero," written by Leo Ditrichstein and A. L. Thomas. Mr. Ditrichstein's supporting company includes Catherine Proctor, Vivian Rushmore, Robert McWade, Brandon Tynan, Cora Witherspoon, Jessie Parnell, Josephine Hamner, William Ricciardi, and others.

Seats for the first eight weeks of Mr. Ditrichstein's engagement at the Vanderbilt Theatre are now on sale at the box office.

William Collier begins his season at the Longacre Theatre on Tuesday night in a new farce called "Nothing But Lies." Aaron Hoffman is the author. The play is in three acts and a little bit more—the little bit more being a prologue. G. M. Anderson and L. Lawrence Weber are the producers.

Mr. Collier is surrounded by a capable cast. Olive Wyndham plays the principal female role. Rapley Holmes, Grant Stewart, William Riley Hatch, Frank Monroe and Robert Strange have important roles. Others are Gordon Burby, Malcolm Bradley, Clyde North and Jane Blake.

"Nothing But Lies" must not be confused with "Nothing But the Truth," Mr. Collier's last successful play. The two plays are dissimilar in every way except the slight similarity in the titles.

At the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre next Wednesday evening A. H. Woods will present a new American play in four acts by Grant Morris and Willard Mack entitled "The Big Chance." The play is said to deal with unusually interesting types and their reactions to a great crisis. The notable company includes Clara Joel, John Mason, Cyril Keightley, Harry Robert, Annie Mack Berlein, William E. Meehan, Katherine Harris Barrymore, Ramsey Wallace and others.

The "Ziegfeld Follies" is to be presented at the Globe Theatre for three weeks, commencing to-morrow evening. The engagement, which is a special one, will mark the first return visit of the "Follies" to any city in a number of years. The original New Amsterdam Theatre cast and beauty contingent will be in evidence. Among the numerous players are Will Rogers, Marilynn Miller, Eddie Cantor, Lillian Lorraine, W. C. Fields, Ann Pennington, Allyn King, Frank Carter, Savoy and Brennan, Harry Kelly, the Fairbanks Twins, Billie Ritchie, Dolores, Gus Minton, Dorothy Leeds, Dorothy Miller and others.

On October 14 the 1918-1919 season of the French Theatre du Vieux Colombier will be inaugurated with the first American presentation in the French language of Henri Bernstein's "Le Secret," which was played for the first time on March 22, 1913, at the Theatre des Bouffes Parisiens.

"Le Secret" was produced in English a few seasons ago under the direction of David Belasco, with Frances Starr in the stellar role. Under the direction of Jacques Copeau in the coming presentation, this part will be played by Lucienne Bogaert, who is a member of the organization who found much favor with its patrons last year.

MEGRUE'S REASONS.

Roi Cooper Megrue's reason for having written "Tea for Three," his new comedy at the Maxine Elliott Theatre, had to be carefully sought out by THE SUN man, who dropped into the theatre a few nights after the opening of the new play.

"How did you come to write it?" the reporter asked Mr. Megrue.

"Just to prove you can take the 'im' out of immoral and still have an interesting story to tell," said Mr. Megrue promptly.

"In other words," interjected the questioner, "to demonstrate that it is possible to write a good story and not compel your audiences to use ear mufflers?"

"Yes, or gas masks," added Mr. Megrue, warming up to his subject, "that it is far easier to write a successful play of the type I object to than it is to turn out a play which I hope 'Tea for Three' will be found to be. For some reason it is far easier to draw a stage character of the unpleasant type than one of the clean, wholesome kind.

"In my experience in writing plays I've noticed that any time I make one of my male characters pretty much of a rotter I am very likely to receive compliments for my faithfulness in depicting character. When I insist on making him a decent chap the best that happens is that no one pays any attention to him at all.

"While I am naturally pleased at the reception accorded 'Tea for Three' I can truthfully say I am proudest of a remark a lady who saw the show on the opening night passed in my hearing. Incidentally she didn't know the author was within hearing.

"'That's the first man on the stage I've ever seen,' the lady said, 'who knows how to treat a woman.'

"Incidentally, that reminds me," said Mr. Megrue, "I forgot I had an appointment with a lady who asked me to read a manuscript, and even if I have succeeded in putting a man on the stage who knows how to treat a woman I'm afraid that won't help me out any unless I make my peace in a hurry. You know you can't neglect them on or off too much," he added as he disappeared down the street.

WILDA BENNETT in "THE GIRL BEHIND THE GUN"

A HEAD OVER HEELS LIFE.

"The State is I. I am the State," observed Louis XIV. in a moment of exaltation. Mitzi may have her moments of exaltation also, but she is far too modest to paraphrase the grand monarch, as she very well might, and say, "The attraction is I. I am the attraction."

However that may be, if a straw vote to determine the most enviable musical comedy queen were taken among all the young ladies who yearn for the calcium light, surely the choice would fall very close to the twinkling little star of "Head Over Heels," the Savage production that has opened the floodgates of Broadway to George M. Cohan's Theatre.

Yet life is not all beer and skittles to Mitzi, although she enjoys every minute of it, strenuous as it is. Probably no musical comedy ever required more unremitting liveliness from its leading lady than "Head Over Heels." So if you would know how doth the little busy bee improve the shining hours, in addition to her acting, singing and acrobatic turns, Mitzi's pursuits off the stage are almost too numerous to record.

Mitzi was sitting before her dressing table, laboring under the disadvantage of having to make up with her forefinger because she had tried to open a can of Bismarck herring all by herself. But she is so good natured that she has not sought to collect anything on her accident insurance and that is also why she did not resent curiosity as to how she had improved the shining hours of that particular day.

In the first place, she had had to grant an audience to the couturiers who are designing the Mitzi frock—you will see it most any day now on the avenue—and then three girls blew in, as she explained with graceful command of the vernacular, and then her furrier from Boston came for a consultation on the cut of her moleskin coatee.

"Hold that!" exclaimed the visitor, detecting substance for a real interview. "What *is* the cut of the coatee?"

"Why," began Mitzi, smoothing off a hunk of lip rouge, "it's just a simple little——"

At this moment there was a knock on the door. Bob Keane, who is *T. Anthony Squibbs* in the play, wanted Mitzi to suggest something for indigestion. Then he noticed that Mitzi was using the lamp. Yes, she was using the lamp, and a superb piece of Bohemian cut glass it was, a present from Mr. Keane and Mr. Judels.

When Mr. Keane had been appeased by a prescription and had departed the matter of the moleskin coatee came up again, but just then there was a knock on the door. Charlie Judels, *Signor Bombinetti* in the play, that Mitzi had sold her motor car to looked in to ask if it was really true buy Liberty Bonds. It was true. She had parted with "the tugboat."

The deck was hardly cleared for action on the coatee again when Dorothy McKay, the charming ingenue, dashed in to see if Mitzi was ready to go on, and then Boyd Marshall, also of the company, wanted something for a headache, and Boob, Mitzi's Mexican cur, broke loose from the maid in an inner room and tried to go over the top, but was checked by a hatbox barrage, under which he growled intermittently. Mexican dogs are said to be immune from Spanish influenza, but Boob's disposition was irretrievably ruined by sixteen consecutive weeks of one night stands in "Sari."

One good thing about Boob is that he is to have a squirrel skin coat with sealskin trimmings made by the Boston furrier, for this led up once more to Mitzi's coatee. It wouldn't be very long on any one else, Mitzi said, but on her it came down about to the hip and was longer behind, having a panel that was sort of tucked up inside, and there was a wide collar of real blue fox and a belt with a bow to one side, and some other details, but just then the call came for Mitzi to make her entrance by climbing over a transom in the first stage setting.

SKINNER, GOLFER.

In these days of fervor on the part of every good American to utilize old and new ways in which to do his or her bit, novel methods for the exhibition of patriotism come to light daily. No profession has been more zealous in helping all the "drives" than that of the theatre, and no player has been more vigorous in his individual efforts than Otis Skinner, now appearing at the Lyceum Theatre in his new comedy, "Humpty-Dumpty." He has appeared times without number at performances for the different funds and was tireless in his work during the last Liberty Loan drive. And now he has discovered a novel way to help the drive for the sale of War Savings Stamps.

Mr. Skinner, be it known, is an ardent golfer, a pupil of no less a links authority than Charles ("Chick") Evans. Thus the greatest of American actors and the greatest of American golfers make the rounds of the courses together whenever their travels make it possible. Each has an intense admiration for the gifts of the other.

Forenoons, afternoons and early evenings, when away from rehearsal periods or actual performances, Mr. Skinner spends on the links. Not only is he a member of the two important golf clubs nearest his home at Bryn Mawr, outside Philadelphia, but he holds membership in several clubs throughout the country that he may avail himself of their links while travelling. In the past it has been the custom on nearly all links to play friendly matches for golf balls, but if Mr. Skinner's campaign, as he outlines it in the following paragraph, achieves the popularity of which it now gives such promise War Savings Stamps will be the favorite wager.

"Our club at home," explained Mr. Skinner, "already has on sale at the clubhouse, at my suggestion, Thrift Stamps and certificates and already the practice of playing for stamps instead of golf balls has been inaugurated. As the season goes on this will develop into quite an item. It will mean the purchase of $20 or $30 worth of Thrift Stamps by golfers on our links every day of the playing season. As the players come in, the losers can buy their stamps at the desk and winners paste them in their little books. To continue this practice during the period of the war in clubs throughout the country would mean no small item in the sale of War Savings Stamps."

Where the Plays Change.

Booth Tarkington's "Penrod" moves from the Globe Theatre to the Punch and Judy in West Forty-ninth street for an indefinite engagement. Matinees will be given on three days.

At the Standard the attraction for the week is Charlotte Walker in "Nancy Lee."

At the Shubert Riviera "The Blue Pearl" will be presented again to New Yorkers.

At Loew's Seventh Avenue Theatre will be seen Augustus Thomas's "The Copperhead," with Lionel Barrymore.

At the Bronx Opera House Gregory Kelly will appear again as Willie Baxter in "Seventeen."

"Ben Hur" is drawing large houses at the Lexington, and the same may be said of "The Wanderer" at the Manhattan Opera House.

PLAYS THAT LAST.

Astor, "Keep Her Smiling"; Belasco, "Daddies"; Belmont, "I. O. U."; Bijou, "Sleeping Partners"; Booth, "Watch Your Neighbor"; Broadhurst, "Maytime"; Casino, "Maid of the Mountains"; Central, "Forever After"; Century, "Sinbad"; Cohan, "Head Over Heels"; Cohan & Harris, "Three Faces East"; Comedy, "An Ideal Husband"; Cort, "Fiddlers Three"; Criterion, "The Awakening"; Eltinge, "Under Orders"; Empire, "The Saving Grace"; Forty-eighth Street, "The Woman on the Index"; Gaiety, "Lightnin'"; Globe, "The Follies"; Harris, "Some Night"; Hudson, "Friendly Enemies"; Knickerbocker, "Hearts of the World"; Liberty, "Going Up"; Longacre, "Nothing But Lies"; Lyceum, "Humpty-Dumpty"; Lyric, "The Unknown Purple"; Manhattan Opera House, "The Wanderer"; New Amsterdam, "The Girl Behind the Gun"; Maxine Elliott's, "Tea for Three"; Morosco, "The Walk-Offs"; Playhouse, "She Walked in Her Sleep"; Plymouth, "Redemption"; Punch and Judy, "Penrod"; Republic, "Where Poppies Bloom"; Selwyn, "Information, Please"; Shubert, "Sometime"; Thirty-ninth Street, "The Big Chance"; Vanderbilt, "The Matinee Hero"; Winter Garden, "Passing Show."

SOME of the GIRLS WHO DO NOT FIDDLE BUT ADD to SUCCESS of "FIDDLERS THREE" at the CORT THEATRE.